

Hope When Life is Hard...



A VERSE BY VERSE
EXPOSITION OF
THE EPISTLE OF
FIRST PETER

When Suffering Shows Up 1 Peter 4:12-13 (705)

1 Peter 4:12-13 *Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you; ¹³ but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing; so that also at the revelation of His glory, you may rejoice with exultation.*

As we approach **1 Peter 4:12-13** it is of some interest and importance I think to realize that in these two verses we hear echoes of at least a half dozen themes from **1:6-7**. I have included 1:6-7 in your outline so you can see this for yourself.

1 Peter 1:6-7 *In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, ⁷ that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.*

Rejoice in 1:6 is echoed by rejoicing and rejoice in 4:13. Distress in 1:6 is echoed by surprised in 4:12. Various trials in 1:6 is echoed by fiery ordeal in 4:12 and share the sufferings of Christ in 4:13. . Tested in 1:7 is echoed by testing in 4:12. Praise, glory and honor in 1:7 are echoed by exultation in 4:13. Finally, the revelation of Jesus Christ in 1:7 is echoed by the revelation of His glory in 4:13. This is no mere curiosity. The Spirit of God, the divine Author, apparently considers these

themes of such significance that they merit repetition. My conclusion is that what the Spirit of God says here must be vitally important to our lives as the children of God. What is said here must be vital to our continuance in the faith. What is said here must be vital to our righteous endurance of hardship.

In this final section of the letter (4:12 – 5:11) Peter speaks more specifically to the issue of Christian suffering. Let's review the connection between hardship and suffering established in one of the first sermons in this series (Feb. 8, 2004). I am quoting John Piper at this point. He says ...

“The most significant difference between sickness and persecution is that persecution is an intentional hostility from someone because we are known to be Christians, but sickness is not. Therefore, in some situations, to choose to be public Christians is to choose a way of life that accepts suffering if God wills (1 Peter 4:19). But suffering may result from living as a Christian even when there is no intentional hostility from unbelievers. For example, a Christian may go to a disease-ridden village to minister, and contract the disease. This is suffering as a Christian, but it is not ‘persecution.’ It is a *choice* to suffer, if God wills, but not from the hostility of others.

“But then, when you stop to think about it, all of life, if it is lived earnestly by faith in pursuit of God's glory and the salvation of others, is like the Christian who goes to the disease-ridden village. The suffering that comes is part of the price of living where you are in obedience to the call of God. In choosing to follow Christ in the way he directs, we choose all that this path includes under his sovereign providence. Thus all suffering that comes in the path of obedience is suffering with Christ and for Christ – whether it is cancer or conflict. And it is

chosen – that is, we willingly take the path of obedience where the suffering befalls us, and we do not murmur against God. We may pray – as Paul did – that the suffering be removed (2 Corinthians 12:8); but if God wills, we embrace it in the end, as part of the cost of discipleship in the path of obedience on the way to heaven” (*Desiring God*, pp. 215-216).

So we may say that our hardship and suffering approximates that suffering with and for Christ envisioned in 1 Peter as we more and more (1) freely *choose* the path of obedience, (2) as we search out and earnestly *pursue* God’s call upon our lives, and (3) as we *expend* our lives for the salvation of others. This one statement should be a great encouragement to some.

Peter’s overarching concern 4:12-13 is with our response to the hardship that comes our way in the path of obedience and in the providence of God. You see, as those who are in the Reformed tradition of Christendom we do not separate suffering from the providence of God. John J. Murray makes the point that “there is a providence” (*Behind a Frowning Providence*, p. 9). He says, “Providence is an old fashioned word and has a strange ring to modern ears. Yet when we break it down into its parts the meaning becomes clear. It comes from the Latin *video* ‘to see’ and *pro* ‘before’, meaning ‘to see beforehand’. In our lives we plan beforehand but we do not see what is going to happen. God has planned everything for His creation and because He is the sovereign God everything will come to pass as He purposed. Providence is that marvelous working of God by which all the events and happenings in His universe accomplish the purpose He has in mind ... The plan of God extends to every detail of my life. This plan is perfect, exhaustive, secret, and for my ultimate good” (*Behind a Frowning Providence*, pp. 9-10). So, there is a providence.

Now, Murray goes on to say that there are “different kinds of providences. There are favorable or smiling providences and there are what appear to be dark or frowning providences ... The Bible leaves us in no doubt that suffering [including hardship, adversity, affliction, sorrow, and disappointment] is a normal part of the true Christian life” (*Behind a Frowning Providence*, p.11-12).

Indeed, Peter’s first point is this: Christian suffering is nothing strange (4:12ac). *Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you ... as though some strange thing were happening to you.* As Christians we are to be those who recognize, accept, and prepare for the inevitability of hardship. Suffering is going to show up.

Now there is a legitimate sense in which we are, in fact, surprised by dark providences. Some things we simply cannot foresee or predict or prepare ourselves for. After some things happen to us about the only thing we can say is that “I never saw it coming.”

The other day Chuck Hulett told me a story that illustrates this point very well. Recently he was inspecting a small strip shopping center on Pioneer Parkway in view of giving a quote to insure it. He was creeping along the parking lot in his Expedition looking at the tenant spaces and making a few notes. As he neared the last tenant space he glanced up to check the roadway in front of him. There was no one else around and the exit to Pioneer Parkway appeared to be some 100 yards away at the end of this long, empty stretch of concrete. As he continued moving forward he felt a sudden bump. His truck stopped. The front end began to drop and the rear began to rise up as if he were on some giant teeter-totter or in a sinking ship slipping head first to the bottom of the sea. He climbed out of

the truck and discovered that he had just driven over a four-foot high drop-off. And there was his vehicle perched on the edge of this little cliff. Sometimes we are surprised like that by things that show up in our lives. We just never see them coming.

Others situations are, of course, more serious. How could my aunt have known about or prepared for the suicide of her husband, my uncle? That was certainly a surprising dark providence. How could my son-in-law have known about or prepared for the sudden death of his 46 year old father last month? That was certainly a surprising dark providence. Years ago tragedy struck a family in our church in Nashville. Three teenage children in this family were involved in an automobile accident. The family was informed of the death of one of the children. Some time later that a second child had died. And some hours later that their third child had passed away. The kind, the timing, the intensity of dark providences truly can be surprising in the sense that they come to us when we do not expect them ... “out of the blue” so to speak.

What Peter is saying is this: Do not be surprised by the fact that hardship, pain, loss, and persecution come to you as a Christian. There is nothing at all strange about this. Hardship is not an occasion for bewilderment or perplexity. Indeed, we are called to this very thing.

1 Peter 2:21 *For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps.*

Beloved, we are called that we might follow Christ, particularly that we might follow Him in His suffering; that we, like our Savior, might patiently endure

unfair suffering, unjust suffering, harsh treatment for doing what is right. So, Christian suffering is nothing strange.

Peter's second point is this: Christian suffering is ours for a reason (4:12b). *Which comes upon you for your testing.* Christian suffering has the fingerprints of God all over it. Sufferings are the means God has ordained to accomplish His good and perfect will in our lives. In this respect our lives mirror that of our Lord. The sufferings of Jesus Himself were viewed as a divine necessity (Mark 8:31; Lu. 24:26). God has more to do with our lives than just effective management of unexpected situations. Our trials come by design. There is purpose behind them. God is ever ordaining. God is ever governing our trials. He determines the timing, the duration, the intensity, and the kind of difficulties through which we must go. God is ever accomplishing His will through our hardships. So, Christian suffering is ours for a reason. And the reason given here is to prove or show that one's faith is the real thing; to demonstrate that one's faith is not merely intellectual or temporal; to show that one is in fact trusting in Jesus Christ alone as He is offered in the gospel; that one's faith is truly a hearty reliance upon the promises of God in Christ.

Peter's third point is that Christian suffering brings joy now (4:13a). *But to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing.* So far from being bewildered, disheartened, or upset, Peter argues that we should rejoice in so far as we are sharing Christ's sufferings. It has been taught from this pulpit over and over again that we are *in Christ*. We are united to Him in His suffering, death, and resurrection. We are identified *with* Him. We are linked *to* Him. His fortunes are our fortunes. Yes, we participate in His sufferings. And, yes, we shall participate in His glory. Joy, then, is not something we work up and

generate ourselves. Joy is a by-product of our union with Jesus. Joy is rooted in this staggering theological truth.

Peter says *to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ*. *To the degree* suggests a couple of things. First, we may rejoice when our suffering is for the same reason as our Lord's. You see, Jesus suffered for the sake of righteousness. He did not suffer on account of His own wrongdoing. The Garden of Gethsemane shows clearly that Jesus suffered on account of His obedience to the Father. And so, to the degree that the hardship comes to us in the path (and even as a consequence) of obedience to Jesus Christ we can rejoice. Many go through grievous physical hardship on account of past abuse and neglect of their bodies. Many go through the pain of divorce on account of their disregard of God's principles for marriage. Many are in a grievous financial condition due to laziness, bad work habits, or financial mismanagement. Many know regret and pain with respect to their children due to lack of godly and consistent discipline and close attention to living a winsome and attractive life before them. Many suffer because of their violation of the civil law. Many suffer on account of a hidden life of sin. Many others suffer on account of their deceitful, contentious, controlling, disagreeable character. Such hardships and trials are not occasions for rejoicing but for grief, godly sorrow, shame, repentance, restitution, and reformation. But to the degree that the hardship comes to us in the path and even as a consequence of obedience to Jesus Christ we can rejoice. So, we may rejoice when our suffering is for the same reason as our Lord's.

Second, we may rejoice when our sufferings for the sake of Christ increase. Grudem puts it this way: "Increased sufferings seem only to increase the believer's joy in the Lord" (*1 Peter*, pp. 178-79). How can such a thing be? So

astonishing is this idea that I want to make sure you understand that this is the consistent witness of God's Word and the experience of men of faith.

Acts 5:40-41 *And [the Council] took his advice; and after calling the apostles in, they flogged them and ordered them to speak no more in the name of Jesus, and then released them. ⁴¹ So they went on their way from the presence of the Council, **rejoicing** that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for His name.*

Acts 16:23-25 *And when they had inflicted many blows upon [Paul and Silas], they threw them into prison, commanding the jailer to guard them securely; ²⁴ and he, having received such a command, threw them into the inner prison, and fastened their feet in the stocks. ²⁵ But about midnight Paul and Silas were **praying and singing hymns of praise to God**, and the prisoners were listening to them.*

Romans 5:3 *And not only this, but we also **exult** in our tribulations.*

Colossians 1:24 *Now I **rejoice** in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I do my share on behalf of His body (which is the church) in filling up that which is lacking in Christ's afflictions.*

Hebrews 10:32, 34 *But remember the former days, when, after being enlightened, you endured a great conflict of sufferings ... ³⁴ For you showed sympathy to the prisoners, and accepted **joyfully** the seizure of your property, knowing that you have for yourselves a better possession and an abiding one.*

Suffering as a Christian confirms to us that we indeed belong to Christ.

Peter's fourth point is this: Christian suffering brings joy in the future (**4:13b**). *So that at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation.* Once again we see the value of simple continuance in the faith. Beloved, rejoice and keep on rejoicing until you know the full extent of that joy when Jesus comes again. "To share in Christ's sufferings means also to benefit from their consequences, for when his glory is revealed at the second coming, we will have every reason to be overjoyed. We will not simply be spectators, so to speak, but be privileged in

some way to share in Christ's glory. Even the English terms *rejoice* and *be overjoyed* make it clear that Peter is far from merely advising us to 'put on a happy face' when suffering for Christ comes our way. Indeed, the Greek words convey the idea of overwhelming delight, a great burst of joy [to rejoice with great spiritual rejoicing] that will fill the jubilant hearts of God's people to overflowing when we greet Christ on his triumphant return in glory" (Hillyer, p. 131).

As believers in this place and in this time we have grown used to nice automobiles, comfortable homes, jobs that pay enough to supply our needs. We've grown used to discretionary income, availability of good medical care, and funds sufficient to allow us to consider and even prepare for retirement. We are free to give substantial portions of time and energy to the recreational pursuits of our children. We've grown accustomed to a government that, for the most part, still protects our right and freedom to worship when and how we please, the freedom to propagate our faith. We simply assume a culture in which housing, food, clothing, medicine and all manner of supplies are abundant and readily available. Persecution is not even on our radar screens. Repression is only occasionally and slightly felt at this point. Aggravation and frustration with inconveniences is the biggest difficulty many of us have known.

Pain, loss, deep disappointment, struggle, opposition, rejection are out there and sooner or later one or more of them will show up on your doorstep. Your faith will be tested. In view of this we must be careful to gear our lives and especially our expectations around the testimony of God's Word. Knowing that suffering is not a threat but a promise. Knowing that suffering does not destroy us but purifies us. Knowing that suffering strengthens our hope. Knowing that

suffering becomes a pledge to us of the reality of our belonging to Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory forever and forever. Amen.

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My conclusion is that what the Spirit of God says here must be _____ important to our lives as the children of God.

In this final section of the letter (**4:12 – 5:11**) Peter speaks more specifically to the issue of Christian _____.

“Thus all suffering that comes in the _____ of _____ is suffering with Christ and for Christ – whether it is cancer or conflict ... but if God wills, we embrace it in the end, as part of the _____ of _____ in the path of obedience on the way to heaven” (Piper, *Desiring God*, pp. 215-216).

Peter’s overarching concern **4:12-13** is with our _____ to the hardship that comes our way in the path of obedience and in the providence of God.

Providence

There is a providence There are different kinds of providences.

The Bible leaves us in no doubt that suffering [including hardship, adversity, affliction, sorrow, and disappointment] is a _____ part of the true Christian life" (*Behind a Frowning Providence*, p.11-12).

Christian suffering is nothing _____ (4:12ac).

Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you ... as though some strange thing were happening to you.

As Christians we are to be those who recognize, accept, and prepare for the _____ of hardship.

Christian suffering is ours for a _____ (4:12b).

Which comes upon you for your testing.

Christian suffering has the _____ of God all over it.

Christian suffering brings joy _____ (4:13a).

But to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing.

We are linked to Christ. His fortunes are our fortunes.

To the degree suggests a couple of things:

We may rejoice when our suffering is for the same _____ as our Lord's.

We may rejoice when our sufferings for the sake of Christ _____.

Christian suffering brings joy in the _____ (4:13b).

So that at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation.

Once again we see the value of simple _____ in the faith.

Beloved, rejoice and keep on rejoicing until you know the full extent of that joy when Jesus comes again.

Pain, loss, deep disappointment, struggle, opposition, rejection are out there and sooner or later one or more of them will show up on your doorstep. Your faith will be tested. In view of this we must be careful to gear our lives and especially our expectations around the testimony of God's Word ...

knowing that suffering is not a threat but a _____ ;

knowing that suffering does not destroy us but _____ us ;

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knowing that suffering becomes a _____ to us of the reality of our _____ to Jesus Christ.